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ABSTRACT

Governments, groups, and individuals have always tried to control information. This paper examines censorship, particularly textbook censorship and its effect upon the curriculum, and opposes the recent trend to censor textbooks in public schools. Since the mission of public schooling involves indoctrination and socialization as much as education, the materials for these ends must be chosen carefully. However, the tradition of censorship is strong in America, and it is estimated that up to 30 percent of the nation's school districts have experienced book and curriculum conflicts. Many censors believe themselves unwaveringly right, and numerous censors have arisen from religious fundamentalism. These fundamentalists target secular humanism in the schools in particular, claiming that it is a religion itself and given unfair preference. Fundamentalists believe that their children's exposure to ideas and beliefs contrary to their own will undermine their children's faith and that children must not be taught to question or to wonder but to accept that which is presented to them. Some censors have a tangible impact on textbook publishers. A written procedure for the purpose of textbook-adoption challenges should be implemented so that no one group can control or limit information without due process. (RJM)

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Censorship Revisited

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Our nation is deeply committed to safeguarding academic freedom, which is of transcendent value to all of us and not merely to the teachers concerned. That freedom is therefore a special concern of the First Amendment which does not tolerate laws that cast a pall of orthodoxy over the classroom...The classroom is peculiarly the 'marketplace of ideas'...The nation's future depends upon leaders trained through wide exposure to that robust exchange of ideas which discovers truth out of a multitude of tongues, rather than through any kind of authoritative selection. (ALA, 1983).

This statement made in 1967 by the United States Supreme Court is so clear in its' intent and basic to democratic principles that it is difficult to fathom how or why any individual or group would attempt to undermine the strength or integrity of the message. Actually, there are, and always have been, governments, groups and individuals who seek to control information. Herein is an examination of censorship, particularly textbook censorship, and its' effects upon the curriculum.

Perhaps it would be appropriate to evaluate the mission of public schooling. In reality, indoctrination is much of what schools are, and have been, about but it is not all that schools are about. If government is to educate children, basic decisions have to be made about the communication of skills, attitudes, values and beliefs between generations. Education and indoctrination, information and values, cannot be disentangled. Socialization and education are not only linked, but the failure of the adult generation to bring children into the larger culture would have disastrous consequences. The

child who is taught nothing of his society's heritage is at as much a disadvantage as the child who is compelled to conform in all respects to the mainstream society. (ALA, 1983). Who, then, determines what is to be taught in public schools? It is the elected representatives of the people--the school boards and school administrators who are accountable to the citizens.

Schools have traditionally been used for the purpose of indoctrinating students and ultimately families into the common culture. Around the turn of the century and into the twentieth century, an immense influx of immigrants graced our shores. The children of these immigrants immediately became enrollees in the public schools. The schools deliberately set out to indoctrinate and Americanize those students. This was important in that the country was pulling together and gearing up for industrialization. Content in curriculum was restricted to traditional American values that centered around the family, church, work and nation. Textbooks portrayed the Puritanical morality, work ethic, individualism, achievement, patriotism and the melting pot theme (Orstein, 1). The curriculum was used to establish and encourage national unity. It was within this environment that public schooling became popularized and commonly viewed as a necessary institution. But if one concedes that public schooling is essential for the well being of the country, then government cannot be denied the power to accomplish objectives which seem to be for the public good. Students are in school because the people have decided they should be there. The elected representatives of the people should be empowered to

make editorial decisions concerning curriculum. The essence of compulsory education is that the state, through the electoral process and not individual parents, will ultimately decide what is best for children (ALA, 1983). The state, or government--through elected representatives then--has played the role of curriculum censor from the inception of public education. With this idea in place, one should not be surprised that groups and individuals try to influence government to be responsive to their wants and needs. The current community-school conflict over censorship has any number of causes. One is the school's unwillingness to recognize the community's role in selecting books. A second is the school's inability to define or clarify the community's role in the selection process. A third cause is that certain overzealous groups tend to push their ideas on others (Ornstein, 1992). It will be interesting to see how school based management will affect book selection at the local level.

Censorship, of course, did not originate in the United States. Throughout history, basic disagreements in attitudes toward philosophy, morality, politics and religion have brought censorship. Among the many instances of censorship of literature, a few interesting examples follow.

Plato rejected the use of bad fiction with children:

> "And shall we just carelessly allow children to hear any casual tales which may be devised by casual persons, and receive into their minds ideas for the most part the very opposite of those which we should wish them to have when they are grown up? We cannot. Then the first thing will be to establish a censorship of the writers of

fiction, and let the censors receive any tale of fiction which is good and reject the bad" (Bryson & Detty, 1982, p. 14).

The ancient Greeks were, of course, not the only culture to censor literature. Hwangti, the Chinese monarch who built the Great Wall, believed that when men became too wise they became worthless. Thus Hwangti destroyed all the literature of China except that dealing with medicine, science or agriculture (Bryson & Detty, 1982). The Catholic Church has actively censored literature throughout the years with lists of prohibited material. The first list was published in 1559 and the last as recent as 1966. There were those who paid the ultimate price for freedom of inquiry. Bruno, a philosopher and scientist, was burned at the stake during the inquisition for his publications. In 1868, English Chief Justice Cockburn delivered a verdict concerning the obscenity of a certain piece of literature which was so persuasive and impressive that its influence was felt both in English and American courts until the middle of the twentieth century. Justice Cockburn said the following:

> "I think the test of obscenity is this, whether the tendency of the matter charged as obscenity is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences, and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall" (Bryson & Detty, 1982, p. 35).

Thus the tradition of censorship is strong. It has been seen throughout human history and across cultures. It survives not unlike a resilient virus that cannot be cured. In recent years, groups that track school book controversies have reported a marked

increase in textbook censorship. Groups as diverse as the Association of American Publishers and the National Council of Teachers of English have estimated that up to 30% of the nation's school districts experienced book and curriculum conflict (Arons, 1981). The People for the American Way reported a 168% increase in reported censorship cases from 1982 to 1987 (Education Daily, 1987). Few people would pay attention to censors if there were no social, economic, moral or political problems. Further, few people would pay attention if the schools were not under fire because of declining SAT scores, rising illiteracy rates, rising costs of education and increasing concern about violence within our society. These political, economic and social hard times have contributed to the increase in censorship activity. The following are some reasons that people have latched on to in an attempt to "clean up" schools and thus society:

- The removal of prayer and Bible reading
- The charge that schools preach the religion of secular humanism
- The teaching of programs such as values clarification, drug education and sex education
- The fact that contemporary writers of children's literature treat subjects that were once considered taboo
- The concern that school books often contain racist or sexist statements
- The feeling of frustration some parents experience when they do not recognize the subject matter their children are studying
- The fact that schools are a convenient target for unhappy citizens whereby citizens feel that everything that's wrong with society stems from the schools (Jenkinson, 1979).

In explaining the reported dramatic increase of censorship activity in the United States, one is directed to those individuals and groups who are initiating school book challenges along with all of the other important and influential "players". It should be first noted, however, that each censor has his or her own agenda for attacking materials. A characteristic of every censor is that they are absolutely certain that they are in the right and that they are working in the best interest of everyone. Some censors even perceive a direct pipeline to God (Jenkinson, 1979). In recent years there have been over 2,000 national, state and local groups which have been involved in the efforts to restrict the public school curriculum through textbook censorship. Perhaps the most active and vocal groups have been identified as either politically or religiously conservative, the "far right". Among groups that have received national attention are Pat Robertson's National Legal Foundation, Phyllis Schalfly's Eagle Forum, Beverly LaHaye's Concerned Women for America, and Mel and Norma Gabler's Educational Research Analysts. Other well-known groups include the Concerned Coalition of Parents, the Liberty Foundation (formerly Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority), the Free Congress, the Pro-Family Forum, the American Education Coalition, the Heritage Foundation, the National Association of Christian Educators, Christian Voice (a California based lobbying group), Religious Round Table, National Christian Action Coalition, Tim LaHayes' American Coalition for Traditional Values, and Citizens for Excellence in Education (Pierard, 1987). These groups reject the assertion that they are censors. They claim that they are trying to correct censorship that has already taken place in that everything

moral has been eliminated from school materials (McCarthy, 1989). In fact these fundamentalists groups claim that there is an ongoing conspiracy by the hands of educators and liberals to convert the country to the religion of secular humanism. This element of the fundamentalists mind set is extraordinarily interesting yet frightening. They define secular humanism as faith in man instead of in God, as a no-God religion. The attribute of religion with regard to secular humanism comes from the fundamentalists' belief that the U.S. Supreme Court "officially" ruled it to be so by way of obscure footnotes in two cases. In fact one of the cases never even mentioned secular humanism and the other case mentions it only as an aside (Jenkinson, 1979). Proving that secular humanism is a religion has been a very important point in the fundamentalists' crusade. By doing so, they believe that they can show that curriculum has been taken over by a religion and that there is a First Amendment issue involving separation of church and state. The anti-secular humanists who enthusiastically point out that educator/philosopher John Dewey signed the first Humanist Manifesto and psychologist B.F. Skinner signed the second, distribute copies of Humanist Manifesto II to prove that the schools are hotbeds of the religion. In that literary work seventeen principles are set forth, portions from each are as follows:

1. As non-theists, we begin with humans not God, nature not deity.
2. Promises of eternal salvation or damnation are illusory and harmful.
3. Ethics is autonomous and situational.

4. Reason and intelligence are the most effective instruments that humankind possesses.

5. The dignity of the individual is a central humanistic value.

6. In terms of sexuality, intolerant attitudes unduly repress sexual conduct. One has the right to birth control, abortion and divorce.

7. The individual must have a full range of civil liberties.

8. There is commitment to an open and democratic society.

9. Separation of church and state are imperatives.

10. Humane societies should evaluate economic systems by whether or not they increase economic well-being for all individuals and groups, minimize poverty and hardship, increase the sum of human satisfaction, and enhance the quality of life.

11. Moral equality must be furthered through elimination of all discrimination.

12. We deplore the division of humankind on nationalistic grounds.

13. The world community must renounce violence and force as a method of solving international disputes.

14. The world community must keep the world environmentally sound.

15. Global answers to economic problems are a must.

16. Technology and scientific research are vital to human progress.

17. Communication and transportation must expand on all frontiers.

To help their followers identify programs that are designed by secular humanists, the National Congress for Educational Excellence published a long list of words, phrases, programs, organizations and foundations that are apparent "red flags" to the *religion* of secular humanism. Here are just a few of the words and phrases contained

in that list: academic freedom, acceptance, accountability, analysis, awareness, behavior, brainstorming, career education, citizenship, conflict, coping, creative writing, democracy, discovery method, emotions, environment, feelings, feminism, global community, group discussion, identity, inductive method, mastery skills, middle schools, parenting, prescriptive teaching, problem-solving, programmed instruction, racism, reinforcing, taxonomy, team teaching, understanding, values and whole child development (Jenkinson, 1979). It is amazing that this list resembles the glossary from any number of teaching methods textbooks. It is the goal of fundamentalists across the country to rid textbooks and curriculum of anything that is perceived to be secular humanist in nature. Not only would these groups have schools be rid of all of the above mentioned terms or programs, they would also like to purge school libraries of any literature that is offensive to them. One list which was distributed by Save Our Children contained authors which should be taken from the shelves because of their alleged homosexuality. The list named Emily Dickinson, Willa Cather, Tennessee Williams, Oscar Wilde, T.E. Lawrence, Walt Whitman, Gore Vidal, John Milton, Hans Christian Anderson, Horatio Alger, Truman Capote and Rod McKuen among others. Some fundamentalists hope that religious schools will soon be more plentiful than public schools. Jerry Falwell once said, "I hope in the next ten years...we will have more Christian day schools than...public schools. I hope I live to see the day when, as in the early days of our country, we won't have any public schools. The churches will have taken them over again and Christians will be running them. What a happy day that will be!"

(Parker, 1988, p. 6). In the meantime, however, textbooks are scrutinized for any hint of "secular humanism" and groups are very quick to bring their concerns to the forefront. One famous "group" from Texas is the Educational Research Analysts, an organization founded and controlled by Mel and Norma Gabler. The Gablers are passionate textbook critics. They are not unlike the nineteenth century crusader and self appointed censor, Anthony Comstock who tried to rid New York of moral decay (Bryson & Detty, 1982). The Gablers spend most of their time reviewing text books both before and after publication. They have become very powerful in Texas as well as in other parts of the United States. Some have said that their work is the most influential in terms of textbook modification and impact upon the curriculum of any one group in the country. Some give the Gablers credit for the "dumbing down" of texts that has occurred in recent years (Pierard, 1987). They adhere closely to fundamentalist beliefs and examine text books with a keen eye toward secular humanist "teachings." They are obviously convinced that they know what is best for America's children, and they have the dedication, the drive, and the spirit to achieve their goal. They have hundreds of dedicated followers evidenced by the number of censorship incidents in which Gabler-distributed materials are used is increasing (Jenkinson, 1979).

Two important cases have been brought before the courts on behalf of fundamentalist families. In Hawkins County, East Tennessee, eleven families objected to a 1983 Holt, Rinehart & Winston reading series for grades 1-8. They charged that the books

contain pacifist, magical, feminist, and anti-Christian themes. The offensive materials included such children's classics as The Wizard of Oz and The Diary of Anne Frank. A story about Leonardo da Vinci and the Renaissance came under fire because it spoke of the idea that the human mind has unknown capabilities for imagination, intelligence and creativity (Hulsizer, 1987). Shel Silverstein's humorous poem "Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout Would Not Take the Garbage Out" was one of many Holt selections cited for promoting disobedience. Sarah Cynthia ignores her parents' orders to dispose of trash until it spreads all over town. The plaintiffs interpreted the poem as a serious attempt to undermine parental authority by showing a disobedient child, and they objected to a suggested discussion question involving the students' own feelings about household chores. Children have no right to form opinions about their parents' orders, so questions about how they feel are like invitations to sin (DelFattore, 1992). Thus, the parents asked for an alternative class using religiously acceptable books. Tennessee authorities said that a separate class would violate the U.S. Constitution. Federal District Judge Thomas Hull (thought to be fundamentalist-minded) held that Hawkins County had violated the families First Amendment rights by not giving the children an alternative except to read the books or leave the school. He ordered the schools to permit the parents to teach reading to their children at home (Parker, 1988).

In Mobile, Alabama, another fundamentalist-minded Federal District Judge W. Brevard Hand granted 624 families requests that 44

elementary and secondary textbooks be removed from Alabama public schools because they advocated a humanistic religion and omitted Christian religious aspects of American life. The Judge ruled for the plaintiffs thus leaving students and teachers with a gutted curriculum in the middle of the school year. Judge Hand wrote, "For purposes of the First Amendment, secular humanism is a religious belief system." This ruling gave fundamentalists what they were looking for. Secular humanism was given the label of a religion by the courts. Furthermore, this court created the first religion to be defined by its opponents (Hulsizer, 1987, p. 15). John Buchanan, chairman of People for the American Way, a civil liberties organization which monitors censorship, said Judge Hand's ruling was "judicial bookburning and nothing less." (Parker, 1988).

One cannot leave "the fundamentalists" without first examining several assumptions underlying their approach to education. The first is that mere exposure ideas and beliefs contrary to their own will undermine a child's faith. But such exposure would not necessarily undermine belief and might actually work to strengthen it. It is virtually impossible for parents to protect children from divergent viewpoints. If children are not exposed to diversity in the classroom, they will encounter it in their reading, on television , or among their peers. A second assumption is that children must not be taught to question or to wonder, but simply to accept that which is presented to them. At a time when educators are struggling to improve higher-level thinking skills, this approach would only serve to stifle critical thought. A third assumption is that scripture and

science both provide scientifically valid accounts of natural phenomena. One, however, is a matter of faith and the other is a product of scientific method and empirical evidence. They need not be pitted against one another (Hulsizer,1987.

It would be incorrect to state that all text book challenges have come from the religious or political right, as challenges have been made by groups spanning the political spectrum. For example, parents in Massachusetts challenged a social studies textbook for allegedly indoctrinating students toward a conservative point of view, and the National Organization for Women and the Council on Interracial Books for Children have criticized the curriculum materials because of their sexist or racial language or their biased presentation of women and minorities (McCarthy, 1989).

Publishers and educators are in the crossfire of all of these very passionate and personal issues. In the past, textbooks presented an idealized American society with traditional, patriotic and majority values. Information considered too sensitive or controversial was simply excluded. This policy elicited no fanfare or controversy, and only occasional criticism. The problem was, however, that some of the content in the textbooks was racist and sexist, at least by today's standards. Today, publishers exercise self-censorship to appease all of the dissenting factions and to avoid alienating pressure groups. Textbook editors take no risks and textbooks alienate no one. They are usually models of the dull and routine which are intellectually uninspiring and also teach a distorted view of history and science. Many history texts almost

ignore religion despite its influence on the formation of our country and on such important contemporary events as the civil rights movement (Hulsizer, 1987). The need for publishers and textbook authors is to be politically correct--to reflect the cultures of diverse student populations. Like other businessmen, publishers listen to what their customers want and they are sensitive to the wishes of textbook selection committees. The major textbook companies conform to the preferences of the larger educational markets--the five most populous states, including California, Illinois, New York, or to the major adoption states--California, Texas (the Gabler's territory) and Florida. These few states exercise a great deal of influence on the books available for study in other states. Most other school systems have little choice but to go along with the choices of a few state school systems (Ornstein, 1992).

The citizens of this country must get over the mistaken notion that matters of religion are too controversial to be dealt with within the classroom. U.S. Supreme Court Justice Tom Clark said in his opinion concerning school prayer in 1963 that "One's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion. The Bible is worth of study for its literary and historic qualities." (Parker, 1988, p. 4). The impact of religion upon art, world history, science and literature has too long been ignored. It is only through exploring and celebrating our differences in a safe, academic environment that we will come to understand ideas that are foreign to us. In this search for understanding of the unknown, we will most assuredly find many points upon which to agree. This scenario is probably unrealistic. It

will take years for some people to accept divergent ideas as worthy of academic inquiry. In the meantime, educators must enrich students at every turn and with any and all material available to them. There must be a written procedure for the purpose of school book challenges so that no one group or individual can control or limit information without due process. And schools and communities must work together in preparing a rich, meaningful and stimulating educational experience for our young people.

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